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Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A Reinterpretation

BY JOHN HIGHAM

In the present state of knowledge about American Jewish history, it may be rash to speak of changing fashions in interpretation. Certainly historical research on American anti-Semitism has been thin in contrast to the formidable accumulation of social studies in this area. Investigation of anti-Semitism in the American past attracted no more than casual interest before the 1930's,¹ and most of the work that historians have done since then has necessarily been descriptive rather than analytical. Yet the few generalizing ventures undertaken in the last twenty-five years do reveal significant shifts of interest and outlook. Two contrasting interpretative viewpoints are discernible. One emerged in the 1930's and continued through most of the following decade. Reflecting the indignant, corrosive liberalism of the New Deal period, this interpretation received its fullest statement from Carey McWilliams. The other view has arisen more recently. It expresses the neo-liberalism of today — a point of view that is not so much conservative, perhaps, as it is critical of assumptions dominant in liberal thought in the 1930's. The neo-liberal approach to anti-Semitism came into focus in some of the writings of Oscar Handlin. Both of these viewpoints have limitations that reflect the present experience out of which they arose; so that one who seeks a more balanced understanding of the whole problem must first appreciate how recent history has shaped the present conflict in interpretation.

What may be called the New Deal interpretation was not a systematic theory but rather a loosely related group of attitudes

EDITOR'S NOTE: — An abbreviated version of this paper was read before the American Jewish Historical Society in February, 1956.

¹ Lee J. Levinger's *Anti-Semitism in the United States: Its History and Causes* (New York, 1925) was really a study of current events, since it confined itself to the postwar period.

crystallized by the crisis of the 1930's. These attitudes included a worried and aroused sensitivity to ethnic conflict, an interest in its conservative or reactionary manifestations, and an economic interpretation of its origins. The Hitler fury in Europe and the stirring of a native fascism at home caused some historians to scrutinize earlier American anti-Semitism with a new intentness. Impelled at times by a muckraking zeal, researchers studied anti-Jewish effusions during the Federalist era, the Civil War, and other periods. Arresting accounts appeared of the arrogance of Henry Adams and the demagoguery of Thomas E. Watson.² On the whole, these inquiries displayed another hallmark of liberal or radical orthodoxy—an inclination to associate anti-Semitism with conservatism and privilege; so that even Tom Watson (in Woodward's biography) seemed to lapse into a generally reactionary outlook as he plunged into ethnic strife. In the late 1940's the New Deal interpretation reached its fullest articulation in a book which combined the liberal's sense of alarm and his focus on reaction with an underlying economic explanation. Carey McWilliams' *A Mask for Privilege* indulged freely in the modern liberal tendency to utilize an economic interpretation of history as a weapon of exposure. Anti-Semitism in America was traced to the industrial revolution of the 1870's and was attributed to the assault of big business upon our democratic heritage.³

Since 1948, when McWilliams' book appeared, the drift of scholars and writers has been away from the premises on which it rested. The remarkable improvement in most phases of American ethnic relations in the years since World War II has discredited the immediate postwar fear of a renewed outburst of anti-Jewish feeling. As the anxieties that spurred much of the scholarship of the thirties and forties subsided, interest in anti-Semitism correspond-

² Leonard A. Greenberg, "Some American Anti-Semitic Publications of the Late 19th Century," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* (Philadelphia), XXXVII (1947), 421-25; Morris U. Schappes, "Anti-Semitism and Reaction, 1795-1800," *ibid.*, XXXVIII (December, 1948), 109-37, and *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States, 1654-1875* (New York, 1950); Bertram W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia, 1951); Edward N. Saveth, *American Historians and European Immigrants, 1875-1925* (New York, 1948), 65-89; C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* (New York, 1938).

³ Carey McWilliams, *A Mask for Privilege: Anti-Semitism in America* (Boston, 1948). For a much more temperate illustration of the liberal economic interpretation see Abram L. Sachar, *Sufferance Is the Badge: The Jew in the Contemporary World* (New York, 1940), 534-39.

ingly diminished. Since the current problem was less pressing, its history seemed less important. Thus a revisionist approach has evolved in which the impact and extent of anti-Semitism in the American past is minimized rather than maximized. Few serious students now are likely to cast a startled and affrighted glance upon every trivial slur and obscure pamphlet. Rather, in the present age of "consensus," the danger may be one of underestimating this and indeed all other divisive forces in American history. In an essay published in 1951, inaugurating the newer interpretation, Oscar Handlin declared that anti-Semitism was insignificant until well into the twentieth century; as late as the 1890's the Jewish stereotype involved "no hostility, no negative judgment." This flat denial of nineteenth-century anti-Semitism was inconsistent with other aspects of his argument, and Handlin made some slight emendations when he incorporated the essay into his popular book, *Adventure in Freedom*. Nevertheless, as the title of that book suggests, a mellow, optimistic point of view was now extended to virtually the whole sweep of American Jewish history.⁴ Here one observes not only a relaxation of the ethnic fears of 1933 to 1948 but also the broader tendency evident in present-day scholarship to re-emphasize the harmony and unity in American society.

In the recent shift in interpretation, this warm, almost nostalgic attitude toward the American past is linked with two other characteristics that reflect our present mood. Neo-liberal scholars are skeptically reappraising the tradition of dissent in America; as a result they are looking into liberal rather than conservative quarters for soft spots in the national culture. In doing so, they are paying more attention to the role of ideas and less to economic forces; for the economic interpretation of history so influential a generation ago has lost much of its old rebellious charm. These changes, too, had a shaping effect on Handlin's key essay of 1951. The essay described the emergence in the 1890's of a new image of the Jew as an international money power striving to control the world economy. Handlin traced this image not to reactionary sources but rather to agrarian radicals, and he attributed it chiefly to a rural habit of mind — a parochial suspicion of things of the

⁴ Cf. Oscar Handlin, "American Views of the Jew at the Opening of the Twentieth Century," *Publications of American Jewish Historical Society*, XL (June, 1951), 325, 328, and *Adventure in Freedom: Three Hundred Years of Jewish Life in America* (New York, 1954), 184.

city. More recently, in a critical re-examination of American reform movements, Richard Hofstadter has underlined the connection between anti-Semitism and the Populist mentality, concluding in fact that Populism "activated most of what we have of modern popular anti-Semitism in the United States."⁵

Evidently, then, one set of assumptions has been giving way to another in the charting of American anti-Semitism. Assurance of its weakness replaces fear of its strength. A "mask for privilege" becomes a by-product of reform. And economic interpretations yield increasingly to psychological and ideological explanations.⁶ One need not deny the usefulness or the partial truth of these revisions in order to feel the need for a vantage point that does not expose the past quite so much to the imperialism of the present.

Although research in this difficult area still remains fragmentary, perhaps at least a start on a firmer interpretation may be made by defining and testing some general rules of procedure. The rest of this paper will set forth certain guiding principles relevant to an objective history of American anti-Semitism. In formulating those principles, it will be useful to apply them to the formative era of the late nineteenth century; for the conflict in interpretation has centered upon the period from 1870 to 1900, when the exceptionally fortunate position which American Jews had secured in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was seriously weakened. During those years the Jews confronted both the beginnings of social anti-Semitism — a pattern of discrimination — and the crystallization of political anti-Semitism — a politically tinged hostility reflecting power hungers.

To begin to understand the attitudes involved in either of these trends, it is necessary first of all to guard against the categorizing tendency that distinguishes too sharply between anti-Semites and philo-Semites or between liberals and conservatives. Stated positively, this premise simply means that most people waver between conflicting attitudes and seldom enjoy an undivided state of mind. Even the supposedly inflexible sort of judgment which the ethnic

⁵ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York, 1955), 80. See, in a similar vein, Harry L. Golden, "Jew and Gentile in the New South," *Commentary* (New York), XX (November, 1955), 403-12.

⁶ This does not mean, of course, that these differences have been sharp and rigid in actual practice or that all scholarship can be so classified. See, for example, the notably objective review of colonial attitudes toward Jews in Jacob R. Marcus, *Early American Jewry* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1951-1953), II, 514-27.

stereotype represents can incongruously combine both positive and negative charges. Because stereotypes are stylized responses, we too often assume that they are simple ones — either black or white. But a stereotype may express ambivalent emotions. It may blend affection and contempt, as the southern image of the Negro has often done. It may mingle pity and censure, as eastern views of the Indian did in the last century.⁷

In the case of the Jew, especially diverse and conflicting attitudes have always existed side by side in American minds. The Jewish stereotype took two entirely different forms, one religious and the other economic; and in either case attractive elements mingled with unlovely ones. Seen in religious terms, the Jew was a portentous figure, at once the glorious agent of divine purpose and the deserving victim of His vengeance. In this orthodox Christian view, the Jews were God's Chosen People, miraculously preserved and sustained; yet they were also an unfaithful people who suffered justly for their betrayal.⁸ Seen in economic terms, the Jew represented both the capitalist virtues and the capitalist vices. As the prototype of the aggressive businessman, the Jew stood for keenness and resourcefulness in trade. Yet keenness also meant cunning, and enterprise suggested avarice.⁹ In the early nineteenth century the bright side of these judgments outshone the tarnished. Later, in an increasingly secularized society, the whole religious image declined, and the unattractive elements in the economic stereotype grew more pronounced. The latent conflict between favorable and unfavorable attitudes came more clearly into the open.

On one hand, a remarkably friendly attitude toward Jews still prevailed widely in the late nineteenth century. Protestant ministers and Reform rabbis frequently exchanged pulpits. Rising Jewish capitalists joined in general community affairs and built

⁷ Roy H. Pearce, *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization* (Baltimore, 1953).

⁸ To choose only a few illustrations, see Elias Boudinot, *A Star in the West* (Trenton, 1816); Hannah Adams, *The History of the Jews from the Destruction of Jerusalem to the Present Time* (London, 1818), 56, 289-90, 549-53; John Marsh, *An Epitome of General Ecclesiastical History, from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (7th ed., New York, 1843), 163-65, 449-58; American Sunday-School Union, *The Jew, at Home and Abroad* (Philadelphia, 1845).

⁹ Schappes, *Documentary History*, 342-45, 402, 557-58; Rudolph Glanz, "Jew and Yankee: A Historic Comparison," *Jewish Social Studies* (New York), VI (January, 1944), 3-30. See also Mitford M. Mathews, *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles* (2 vols., Chicago, 1951), I, 905.

lavish homes in the most exclusive neighborhoods.¹⁰ The traditional American image of the Jew as a constructive economic force — a model of commercial enterprise, energy, and integrity — still provided material for popular orators and storytellers.¹¹ On the other hand, a distrust that expressed itself in the other side of the economic stereotype steadily gained ground during the post-Civil War decades. Since this distrust clashed with the prevailing temper of American culture, anti-Semitic attitudes were often covert and usually blurred by a lingering respect. Many Americans were both pro- and anti-Jewish at the same time.

This duality was particularly evident among the rural radicals whom Handlin singled out for special emphasis. No other sector of native American opinion had such strong incentives to seek a Jewish scapegoat. At a time when Jews and their admirers boasted of their wealth, farmers and workingmen were struggling vainly to curb the accumulation of power and wealth by a business plutocracy. Just as Wall Street provided an *institutional* symbol of that plutocracy, so the Jews offered an *ethnic* symbol of the same giant adversary. As Shylocks, the Jews stood not only for plutocracy in general but also for the financial power of gold in particular. Professor Handlin has made an important contribution in pointing out that the men who crusaded passionately against the gold standard in the 1890's sometimes attributed their repeated setbacks to the Jews.¹²

Yet the Populists and other currency reformers who saw the "Shylocks of Europe" pitted against the "toilers" of America¹³ were also the very groups most deeply swayed by the ideals that had made the United States a beloved homeland for thousands of Jews. The whole agrarian crusade of the late nineteenth century drew vitality from the best traditions of American democracy and Christianity. James B. Weaver, the Populist candidate for presi-

¹⁰ *Public Opinion* (Washington), III (August 27, 1887), 423; Stuart E. Rosenberg, *The Jewish Community in Rochester, 1843-1925* (New York, 1954), 105-106.

¹¹ Hezekiah Butterworth, *In Old New England: The Romance of a Colonial Fireside* (New York, 1895), 46-78; New York *Herald*, September 15, 1891; Zebulon B. Vance, *The Scattered Nation* (New York, 1904). For background see Selig Adler, "Zebulon B. Vance and the 'Scattered Nation,'" *Journal of Southern History* (Baton Rouge), VII (August, 1941), 357-77.

¹² Handlin, "American Views of the Jew," *Publications of American Jewish Historical Society*, XL (June, 1951), 332-34.

¹³ J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *Illustrated History of Nebraska* (3 vols., Lincoln, 1905-1913), III, 244; *Arena* (Boston), XVI (September, 1896), 699.

dent, spoke feelingly of maintaining America's mission as an asylum for the oppressed of all nations. His fellow reformers appealed constantly to the doctrines of the Declaration of Independence and to "the great bond of brotherhood which lies at the base of Christianity."¹⁴ When such men struck at the Jews, they violated their own motivating principles.

As a result, the reformers displayed a divided state of mind that defies easy classification. Ignatius Donnelly, the fiery Minnesota agitator whose utopian novel, *Caesar's Column*, forms the linchpin in Handlin's argument, epitomized this inner conflict. The Jews he regarded as "a noble race" perverted by the terrible persecutions Christians had inflicted upon them. While viewing the Jews as a repulsive incarnation of materialism, Donnelly urged a spirit of charity toward them. "We should not feel incensed against the nut-gathering tribe. . . . It is their instinct. They can no more help the cast of their minds than they can the cast of their features, and one generally fits the other."¹⁵ Similar rationalizations of inner conflict may be found elsewhere in Populist literature, as for example in an anti-Semitic pamphlet entitled *Tit for Tat*, in which an anonymous midwestern radical argued that the Jew was simply turning the tables on his erstwhile persecutors in gaining a ruinous economic monopoly over the Christian world.¹⁶

Although the dilemma of these democratic anti-Semites may seem especially poignant, a comparable ambivalence extended far beyond reform groups. At one moment an editorial in the great New York *Tribune* might describe Jews and Christians as united by a common spiritual heritage and steadily outgrowing old animosities; at another moment the same paper might comment: "There must be some other cause than their religion which makes these people dreaded as permanent inhabitants by every country to which they come." A Boston newspaper combined positive and negative judg-

¹⁴ James B. Weaver, *A Call to Action: An Interpretation of the Great Uprising, Its Source and Causes* (Des Moines, 1892), 281-82; Milford W. Howard, *The American Plutocracy* (New York, 1895); [Ignatius Donnelly], *Caesar's Column: A Story of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 1890), 3.

¹⁵ *Caesar's Column*, 37; Ignatius Donnelly, *The American People's Money* (Chicago, 1895), 67, 136-37.

¹⁶ Prof. Pal. Sylvanus, *Tit for Tat: Satirical Universal History; How Mr. Solomon Moses Is Persecuting His Old Persecutors* (Chicago, 1895). See also Semper Veritas, *An Appeal to the Jews, to Stimulate Them to Obtain a Higher State of Civilization; and Other Miscellaneous Matter for the Advancement of Moral Discipline* (San Francisco, 1878).

ments in a single sentence: "It is strange that a nation that boasts so many good traits should be so obnoxious."¹⁷ Most of the anti-Semitism in native American circles in the late nineteenth century was entangled with a persistent sympathy, and this circumstance must be steadily recognized if we are to avoid exaggerating or underrating the phenomenon.

A second cardinal principle too little attended in the study of anti-Semitism is the importance of the role that the minority group itself plays in the conflict situation. Though prejudices distort reality, they also reflect it. In emphasizing the powerful irrational forces that enter into ethnic hostilities, one should not sentimentally ignore the objective differences and irreducible irritations that set the stage for conflict. Both the New Deal and the neo-liberal interpretations have a common tendency to clothe the Jew in innocence — to concentrate almost entirely on the anti-Semite's need for a scapegoat. A deeper historical understanding must take account of the factors within Jewish history that have served to magnetize external antagonisms.

In this connection it should be observed that the unusual ambition and competitive drive for which the Jews were widely admired were not an unmixed blessing in the late nineteenth century. These incentives propelled them upward in American society with amazing rapidity at a time when a general scramble for social prestige was dislocating the American status system. The rise of social discriminations against Jews, beginning in the 1870's, can not be understood apart from the involvement of a good many Jewish *nouveaux riches* in the hectic social competition of the Gilded Age.

In the post-Civil War decades social climbing ceased to be a simple and modest expectation and became a real social problem. From small-town women's clubs to Fifth Avenue drawing rooms, wave upon wave of successful people clamored for admission to more prestigious circles. Each group as it rose strove to protect its gains from later comers. Manuals of etiquette, ancestral pedigrees, and the trappings of aristocratic culture proliferated in a continuous attempt to redefine the broken lines of status. As invidious barriers

¹⁷ New York *Tribune*, September 27, 1891, p. 6, and June 28, 1882, p. 4; Boston *Saturday Evening Gazette*, quoted in *Jewish Messenger* (New York), XLVI (August 1, 1879), 2.

complicated the social ladder, the Jews fell subject to exclusions because, more than any other ethnic group, they symbolized the up-thrust that was troubling middle- and upper-class life as a whole.

By the 1870's a remarkable number of the German Jews who had landed in the United States penniless and uneducated twenty years before, and had started as peddlers, were rising literally from rags to riches.¹⁸ It seems highly unlikely that in any other immigrant group so many men have ever advanced so rapidly. Many of them bore the marks of this experience in the form of assertive manners and aggressive personalities.¹⁹ Thus a new stereotype of the Jews as rude, ostentatious parvenus took form,²⁰ both distorting and reflecting their ambition and success. Through this stereotype, and the discriminations that accompanied it, a society vexed by its own assertiveness gave a general problem an ethnic focus.

Instead of knuckling under, as a more passive minority might have done, many Jews struggled against the restrictions that appeared at summer resorts and clubs. This resistance often made matters worse. When one of the leading establishments at Saratoga Springs turned away the eminent banker, Joseph Seligman, in 1877, Jews retaliated by buying several of the leading hotels. In a decade the Jewish summer population doubled, and Saratoga became a cockpit of social strife.²¹ There and elsewhere efforts to cross the new barriers confirmed the prejudices on which they rested.

The conspicuousness of Jewish wealth had a bearing on political as well as social anti-Semitism. In assessing Populist attitudes, one should not blink the fact that Jews themselves contributed to the exaggerated impression of their financial power prevalent in late nineteenth-century public opinion. In the innocence of their pride Jewish spokesmen publicized with glowing words the economic suc-

¹⁸ Gustav Gottheil, "The Position of the Jews in America," *North American Review* (New York), CXXVI (March-April, 1878), 303; Isaac Markens, *The Hebrews in America* (New York, 1888), 139-73; Boston *Herald*, quoted in *The Hebrew* (San Francisco), June 20, 1884.

¹⁹ For the testimony of sympathetic observers see *The Hebrew*, March 30, 1894, p. 1; Alice Hyneman Rhine, "Race Prejudice at Summer Resorts," *Forum* (New York), III (July, 1887), 527; Nina Morais, "Jewish Ostracism in America," *North American Review*, CXXXIII (September, 1881), 270; *Jewish Messenger*, LXV (May 10, 1889), 5; Anna Laurens Dawes, *The Modern Jew: His Present and Future* (Boston, 1884), 29-30.

²⁰ In addition to the above references see *Life* (New York), XIII (May 2 and June 6, 1889), 258-59, 334-35.

²¹ *Public Opinion*, III (September 3, 1887), 441; Hugh Bradley, *Such Was Saratoga* (New York, 1940), 187-88.

cess some of their people enjoyed. One asserted in a popular magazine, for example, that the Jews controlled the finances of San Francisco. Another alleged that on Jewish holidays the business of the exchanges almost ceased.²² Meanwhile, the fame of the European Rothschild family vividly stimulated the imagination of a public avid for news of the very rich. During the Gilded Age the Rothschild name suggested, in the words of a contemporary biographer, "visions of untold wealth and unrivalled power, which appear so startling and amazing as to be more appropriate to romance than real life."²³ Unfortunately, this international banking house, which specialized in government loans, became involved in one of the most unpopular financial transactions the United States Treasury ever undertook. When President Cleveland's efforts to save the gold standard culminated in 1895 in a secretly negotiated contract to buy gold in Europe, three names appeared on the contract: J. P. Morgan and Company, August Belmont and Company, and N. M. Rothschild and Sons.²⁴ By singling out the Rothschilds as the key figures in the transaction, silverites found all the evidence they needed of how the Jewish money power profited from American distress.²⁵

At the very time when the Rothschilds were exercising the American imagination and German Jews in considerable numbers were climbing the social ladder, the arrival of a mass immigration from

²² Gustav Adolph Danziger, "The Jew in San Francisco: The Last Half Century," *Overland Monthly* (San Francisco), XXV (April, 1895), 382; Henry Hanaw, *Jew Hating and Jew Baiting: An Essay* (Nashville, 1894), 8; Markens, *Hebrews in America*, *passim*.

²³ John Reeves, *The Rothschilds: The Financial Rulers of Nations* (Chicago, 1887), 1. See also Joel Benton, "The Rothschilds," *Munsey's Magazine* (New York), VII (April, 1892), 37-40; *New York Tribune*, September 19, 1891, p. 6, commenting on "The immense influence wielded by the Jewish princes of finance upon the Western Governments of Europe"; and constant references by Populist writers, such as *National Economist* (Washington), October 8, 1892, p. 6. One can find in American sources attacks on the Rothschilds as "the poor man's foes and the willing tools of despots" as early as the Civil War era. See Paterson *Daily Press*, quoted in *Jewish Messenger*, XV (February 5, 1864), 36.

²⁴ Specifically, the Secretary of the Treasury entered into an agreement with "Messrs. August Belmont and Company, of New York, on behalf of Messrs. N. M. Rothschild and Sons, of London, England, and themselves, and Messrs. J. P. Morgan and Company, of New York, on behalf of Messrs. J. P. Morgan and Company, of London, and themselves." "Issue and Sale of Bonds," *House Reports*, 53 Cong., 3 Sess., No. 1824, p. 3.

²⁵ James A. Barnes, *John G. Carlisle: Financial Statesman* (New York, 1931), 390-91, 397; *Review of Reviews* (New York), XI (March, 1895), 261; *Jewish Messenger*, LXXVIII (July 12, 1895), 4.

eastern Europe further complicated the whole Jewish problem. Most native Americans thrown into contact with the impoverished, unkempt throngs from the ghettos of eastern Europe viewed them with more than a little distaste.²⁶ Many German-American Jews, appalled at the outlandish looks and ways of the newcomers, feared that their own reputation was suffering from the popular habit of judging all Jews as alike.²⁷ Perhaps it did. Certainly the new immigration accentuated the aura of foreignness that still clung to American images of the Jew. Moreover, this mass migration involved the Jews prominently in the multiple ethnic conflicts that arose along with the increasing volume and diversity of the whole immigrant influx.

Whatever may be the exact weight of these various factors in shaping feeling about the Jews, the role that the victim plays in any ethnic friction explains only part of the hostility he meets. An appreciation of the ambiguity of ethnic stereotypes and of the objective dimension in group conflict may prevent simplification or sentimentality; but these approaches may leave the controlling factors in the larger social context entirely unexplored. Here a third rule of procedure suggests itself. To identify the critical elements in a conflict situation requires a consistently comparative approach. In other words, the status of American Jewry in a given era needs to be related to the experience of other American ethnic groups in the same period, to the Jewish experience in other periods of American history, and to the concurrent fate of Jews in other countries.

At the lowest and most immediate level of comparison, it is evident that many immigrant groups underwent attack in late nineteenth-century America, though in varying ways and degrees.²⁸

²⁶ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, 1955), 66-67. See also *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Berlin), LV (October 9, 1891), appendix, p. 4.

²⁷ As early as 1872 a popular magazine article by a German-American Jew begged the public not to judge all Jews by the "ignorant . . . bigoted, and vicious" Poles and Russians who clustered around Chatham Street and East Broadway. Later B'nai Brith and other organizations believed that Americanization of the newcomers was the only effective way of checking the growth of anti-Semitism. Although these reactions often reveal a prejudice of their own, one can not dismiss such fears as wholly unfounded. W. M. Rosenblatt, "The Jews: What They Are Coming To," *Galaxy* (New York), XIII (January, 1872), 47-48; *23rd Annual Convention of District Grand Lodge No. 6, I. O. B. B.*, 1891, appendix, p. 19. See also Zosa Szajkowski, "The Attitude of American Jews to East European Jewish Immigration (1881-1893)," *Publications of American Jewish Historical Society*, XL (March, 1951), 222-32.

²⁸ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 26-27, 66-67, 92-94.

Here it is sufficient to say that the Jews met neither as much hostility nor as much tolerance as certain other minorities. Although rapid social advancement apparently exposed and sensitized many Jews to more social discrimination than other European groups felt, in other respects they fared somewhat better. They did not fall victim to as much violence as did the Italians, and there was no organized anti-Semitic movement comparable to the anti-Catholic American Protective Association. Still, the Jews did constitute one of the prominent ethnic targets in the 1880's and 1890's. Certainly they did not share the relative exemption from nativist attack that the Scandinavians, for example, enjoyed. Comparisons of this kind indicate that the Jew experienced neither the unusual disadvantage which the New Deal interpretation may imply nor the warm acceptance sometimes suggested by the neo-liberal view.²⁹ Moreover, such comparisons call attention to a fact of utmost significance — that anti-Semitism formed an integral part of a larger, more complex upswing of anti-foreign feeling.

But perhaps a broader comparison in point of time and space may help to explain the link between anti-Semitism and the other ethnic tensions that arose along with it in late nineteenth-century America. A general look backward across the whole development of political anti-Semitism in the United States and western Europe during the last hundred years discloses three periods of special intensity. On both sides of the Atlantic anti-Semitism advanced simultaneously — first, in the 1880's and 1890's, then in the years immediately after the First World War, and finally in the 1930's. The first period saw the emergence of Adolf Stoecker in Germany, Édouard Drumont in France, and a movement against Jewish immigration in England. The second, from 1919 to 1923, brought the international circulation of the notorious *Protocols*, an outbreak of anti-Semitic journalism in England, the National Socialist party and the assassination of Rathenau in Germany, and, in America, the crusades of Henry Ford and the Ku Klux Klan. The climax, here and in Germany, came in the thirties. In the intervals between these

²⁹ Handlin, "American Views of the Jew," *Publications of American Jewish Historical Society*, XL (June, 1951), 326-29, compares the Jewish stereotype with other ethnic stereotypes but asserts that *none* of them reflected a depreciatory attitude. The truth would seem to be rather that *all* of them involved unflattering elements, but in different degrees. The further contention that Jews accepted the comic caricature of themselves (though in fact many Jews indignantly rejected it) points to a fact of minority psychology, not to the absence of hostility.

periods two breathing spells occurred. Anti-Semitism made no significant advances in America or western Europe in the early years of the twentieth century; and again in the mid-twenties the agitation declined.⁸⁰ The vast difference of intensity between America and some European countries should not obscure a common rhythm.

If, then, anti-Semitism has ebbed and flowed on an international level, one can not find the decisive forces that activated it by a merely internal examination of American traditions, circumstances, or habits of mind. Interpretation must pivot upon general developments in western civilization — developments that repeatedly inflamed or dampened anti-Semitism on both sides of the Atlantic at roughly the same time.

Here the economic interpretation — if broadly construed and stripped of the polemical character it had in New Deal historiography — offers a still valid insight. Certainly the cyclical rhythm of modern anti-Semitism has depended upon factors that were partly economic. Each of the periods of anti-Semitic ferment was one of depression in both America and western Europe. Yet not of depression alone. In each case, economic distress functioned as one element in a complex of social and economic dislocations within the western nations. The years from 1873 to 1896 unleashed severe class conflicts and a general unrest that revived during the postwar disorganization after 1918 and reached a culmination in the 1930's. Each age had good cause to believe that the whole social system was somehow being undermined. These tensions had relaxed in the early twentieth century as the achievements of imperialism and social democracy made themselves felt. Again, in the mid-1920's a growing stability revived confidence in the existing social order.

But social and economic frustrations did not stir up ethnic frictions automatically. The recurrent pattern of social and economic strain was accompanied by a persistent ideological disturbance. Each of the crisis periods produced a powerful display of nationalism, and it was the blindly cohesive energy of nationalism that channeled internal discontents into agitation against foreign influences. Consequently, anti-Semitism in the modern world has

⁸⁰ The downswing in the early twentieth century is treated in Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1951), 50-53, and Paul W. Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction: A Study of Political Anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1949), 113-48. On the 1920's see Sachar, *Sufferance Is the Badge*, 23-33, 256-57, 322, 351-53.

reached maximum intensity as an integral component of movements aimed at defending the nation from various perils originating beyond its frontiers.

With these considerations in mind, the ethnic scene in America in the late nineteenth century becomes more intelligible. It was a time of mass strikes, widening social chasms, unstable prices, and a degree of economic hardship unfamiliar in earlier American history. On the same scene a strong upsurge of nationalism expressed itself in jingoist outbursts against England and other countries, proliferation of patriotic societies, a powerful tariff agitation, and the birth of a movement for immigration restriction that increased by leaps and bounds. In broad outline, both the social situation and the nationalist response paralleled the contemporary experience of western Europe. In such a likely context for anti-Semitism, the Jews of America were fortunate to have suffered as little as they did. The relative mildness of American, as compared to European, anti-Semitism must be attributed not only to the more tolerant traditions of the United States but also to the presence within the country of a great variety of ethnic targets. Since the fire of American nationalists was scattered among many adversaries, no one minority group bore the brunt of the attack. Hatred of Catholics, of Chinese, of the new immigration as a whole, and above all a diffuse nativist hostility to the whole immigrant influx overshadowed specifically anti-Jewish agitation. Nevertheless, a good deal of distinctively anti-Semitic sentiment also emerged. Significantly, it was strongest in those sectors of the population where a particularly explosive combination of social discontent and nationalistic aggression prevailed.

Three groups in late nineteenth-century America harbored anti-Jewish feelings that went beyond mere social discrimination: some of the agrarian radicals caught up in the Populist movement; certain patrician intellectuals in the East, such as Henry and Brooks Adams and Henry Cabot Lodge; and many of the poorest classes in urban centers. Different as they were, each of these groups found itself at a special disadvantage in the turmoil of an industrial age — the poor because it exploited them, the patricians because it displaced them. Thus Henry Adams, whose anti-Semitism lacked the democratic restraints that qualified the thinking of the Populists, agreed with them in identifying the Jew with the menace of plutocracy. To judge from his published letters, it was only in the late

1880's, after a sense of the powerlessness of his own aristocratic class had settled upon him, that Adams began to see the Jew as the supreme expression of a commercial, bourgeois society. The depression of the nineties put matters in a still worse light for both of the Adams brothers. The economic collapse indicated to them the approach of a general social catastrophe, and the Jew loomed as both the symbol of a materialistic society and an agent of its destruction. In "a society of Jews and brokers," Henry Adams wrote in 1893, "I have no place." He looked forward to a complete smash-up. "Then, perhaps, men of our kind might have some chance of being honorably killed in battle."³¹ It is worth adding that the Adamses were not the only upper-class intellectuals who felt this way. The same patrician pessimism underlay the anti-Semitic outbursts in Vance Thompson's elegantly bohemian magazine, *M'lle New York*.³²

Beside a common resentment against a business culture, the patrician and the plebeian anti-Semite shared a similar kind of beligerent nationalism. Both had a touch of the jingo spirit and longed for a militant assertion of American power. There is evidence that jingoism arose mostly from the underdog elements in American society — notably from the urban lower classes who read the yellow press and from the southern and western Democrats and Populists who chafed under the stodgy respectability of Cleveland and McKinley.³³ Nevertheless, some of the most ardent jingoes belonged to the patrician elite, and they were capable of talking much like the mob about the need for reviving patriotism and about the pernicious influence of the "international Jew" over the American government. Henry Adams might not always concur with Brooks's avid pursuit of war and empire, but they agreed that America would somehow have to strike off the chains of Europe if it would free itself from Shylock's grasp.³⁴

³¹ Worthington C. Ford (ed.), *Letters of Henry Adams* (2 vols., Boston, 1938), I, 388-89; II, 33-35, 98, 111; Thornton Anderson, *Brooks Adams: Constructive Conservative* (Ithaca, 1951), 60. Barbara M. Solomon's recently published book, *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* (Cambridge, 1956), 32-42, works out more carefully and extensively the same general point that has been made here about Henry Adams.

³² *M'lle New York* (New York), I (November-December, 1895), n. p., and II (November, 1898), 2. See also Henry James, *The American Scene* (New York, 1907), 131, 138-39.

³³ Richard Hofstadter, "Manifest Destiny and the Philippines," in Daniel Aaron (ed.), *America in Crisis* (New York, 1952), 177-82.

³⁴ Harold Dean Cater (ed.), *Henry Adams and His Friends: A Collection of Un-*

The jingoism of the Populists deserves special mention, for it suggests that their anti-Semitic rhetoric did not come from a radical impulse as much as from a nationalist one. The great enemy of the agrarian forces in the 1890's was an international mechanism, the gold standard; bimetallism, on the other hand, would constitute a strictly American policy. Radical bimetallists believed that the gold standard had been foisted on the United States by an international conspiracy centering in England; for was not England the leading champion of gold, as well as America's traditional adversary? Consequently the Populists and Bryan Democrats lost no opportunity to vent their Anglophobic spleen. Often they expressed the belief that war with England was essential to American economic independence. The Jew entered the picture — when he did — as the financial agent of British world power. The agrarians attacked English influence far more frequently than Jewish influence; and when they turned upon Shylock also, they associated him closely with John Bull.³⁵

A third group in which anti-Semitism took strong root deserves, though it has not received, at least as much emphasis as the other two. The underprivileged masses in the cities, if less articulate than either patrician or Populist, were more deeply engaged in ethnic conflict. It is doubtful if any rural radical with vague visions of a Rothschild conspiracy felt as fiercely as the "Workingman" who wrote to the *New York Sun* that the Jews would soon either completely control the government and economy or would all be dead. Nor did any rustic pamphleteer even approach the venom of a New York agitator who accused the Jews of controlling the currency, fixing public opinion, overthrowing governments, driving workingmen into useless strikes, and spreading typhus and cholera.³⁶ Here, too, social unrest intersected with nationalistic belligerence. But what made urban anti-Semitism especially striking and intense was the further circumstance that it arose primarily from people of recent immigrant background.

published *Letters* (Boston, 1947), 391; Anderson, *Brooks Adams*, 73. See also *M'lle New York*, I (September, 1895), 2.

³⁵ See the Populist writings reviewed in Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 77-81; those cited in notes 12 and 13 above; and William M. Stewart, *Bondholders' Conspiracy to Demonetize Silver* (San Francisco, 1885), 3, 24-25. On agrarian warmongering see also Barnes, *John G. Carlisle*, 264, 410.

³⁶ *New York Sun*, March 24, 1895; Anon., *The Talmud-Jew: A True Exposure of the Doctrines and the Aims of Judaism* (New York, 1892), 5-6.

This circumstance should hardly occasion surprise. Certainly the pressures of a raw, industrial age bore especially harshly on the disorganized minorities pent up in city slums; and it is a sociological commonplace that the second-generation immigrant often developed rabidly chauvinistic tendencies in his longing for acceptance. These factors accentuated the ethnic rivalries within immigrant districts. Jostling against one another in intimate competition for living space, livelihood, and status, the immigrants found their adversaries close at hand, and the influence of an Old World heritage gave much of this friction an anti-Semitic character. Consequently the teeming Jewish districts that sprang up in the slums of the big cities were surrounded by other immigrant enclaves where anti-Semitic attitudes transplanted from Europe could thrive.

In this situation the Jews no longer had — as they did before the Civil War — the protection of a secure place within the cultural orbit of German-America; for American Jewry was losing its predominantly German complexion, and the Germans were drawing aloof from the Jews. Sometimes Jews complained that hostility toward them was strongest among the German element.³⁷ The complaint was undoubtedly exaggerated, but it is noteworthy that the most violently anti-Semitic pamphlet published in nineteenth-century America followed slavishly a classic German source, that a German importer sponsored the abortive American lecture tour of Hermann Ahlwardt, leading anti-Semitic agitator, and that a self-styled "American Anti-Semitic Association" appeared in Brooklyn around 1896 under the leadership of F. J. Gross, E. Aug. Lehuermann, and E. Findeisen.³⁸

Yet it was not Germans but rather two eastern Europeans who played the role of pioneers in introducing to these shores the new anti-Semitic ideology that was burgeoning in the Old World. In 1882 Mme. Zénaïde Alexeïevna Ragozin, a Russian lady who had come to the United States a few years before and who had just recently been naturalized, published in the *Century Magazine* a vivid explanation of why the Russian peasants were massacring Jews. The outbreaks, she declared, did not arise from a spirit of

³⁷ *Ha-maggid* (Lyck, Prussia), XXIX (January 29, 1885), 36; *Ha-tsefrâh* (Warsaw), IX (May 2, 1882), 119; Jacob R. Marcus, "Index to Americana in Foreign Jewish Periodicals" (Typescript copy, American Jewish Historical Society), 27-28.

³⁸ *Talmud-Jew*; New York *Tribune*, December 13, 1895, p. 1; *Congressional Record*, 54 Cong., 1 Sess., 5215.

intolerance. The Jews themselves had goaded the long-suffering populace into its "momentary frenzy"; for they constituted an *imperium in imperio*, secretly and systematically conspiring to engross the entire wealth of the country.³⁹

Mme. Ragozin wrote too early to phrase the attack in terms of race. The dubious honor of inaugurating race-thinking anti-Semitism in America belongs to a middle-class Greek immigrant, Telemachus Timayenis. While establishing himself in New York City as a language teacher and tutor, Timayenis developed a varied literary career. He produced fifteen books altogether, including popular history, romantic novels, and three works on the "Jewish question." An unprincipled schemer, he evidently hoped to be the advance agent of an organized anti-Semitic movement. To that end he formed a publishing house and tried to launch a monthly magazine.⁴⁰ The first of his books in this vein, *The Original Mr. Jacobs: A Startling Exposé*, appeared in 1888, two years after Édouard Drumont opened the floodgates of French anti-Semitism. Timayenis simply copied Drumont's ideas. According to Timayenis and Drumont, European history reveals an elemental conflict between the noble Aryan and the plotting Jew; the latter intrigues incessantly to overthrow the Aryan order of things through financial monopoly on the one hand and revolution on the other.

These effusions are of interest because their systematic virulence surpasses anything that can be identified with a native American writer during the nineteenth century. Otherwise, however, the writings of immigrant anti-Semites of the time are not important, for none of them left any visible impression on American culture. Whereas Drumont created a sensation in France, his disciple in America fulminated in obscurity and neglect. If immigrant anti-Semitism consisted of nothing more than the writing of unread tracts, it would deserve little notice. In fact, however, the Jews also suffered directly at the hands of their fellow immigrants. In

³⁹ Z. Ragozin, "Russian Jews and Gentiles," *Century Magazine* (New York), XXIII (April, 1882), 905-20. The *Century* editors cautiously subtitled the article "From a Russian Point of View," half-apologized for the "extremely mediaeval aspect" of the charges (p. 949), and hastened to publish a rebuttal by Emma Lazarus in the next issue. It is hard to understand Handlin's characterization of the article as "not hostile."

⁴⁰ Harold J. Jonas and Leonard A. Greenberg have kindly made available to me their biographical and critical study of Timayenis, which is awaiting publication.

the urban slums of the late nineteenth century "Jew-baiting" became a daily occurrence.

Beginning, apparently, in the 1880's, the Jewish peddlers who swarmed through the poorer districts of the large cities were continually taunted, stoned, and otherwise manhandled by street gangs. Beard-pulling was one of the commonest forms of bedevilment,⁴¹ but more serious assaults became increasingly frequent in the 1890's. Irish and German rowdies seem to have caused most of the trouble. In 1899 a united protest from fourteen Jewish societies in Brooklyn declared: "No Jew here can go on the street without exposing himself to the danger of being pitilessly beaten."⁴² Appeals for police protection were generally futile. At the end of the century, therefore, eastern European Jews in Chicago, Brooklyn, Worcester, and Holyoke formed protective associations designed to prosecute offenders and arouse officials.⁴³

The climactic incident occurred on New York's Lower East Side in 1902. The occasion was a solemn event in the history of the New York ghetto: the mass funeral of the leading figure in the Orthodox community, Rabbi Jacob Joseph. Thousands of mourners took part in the vast, formless procession that followed the coffin from synagogue to synagogue en route to the grave in Brooklyn. To reach the Grand Street ferry, the procession had to pass through the Irish district near the East River. The Irish resented the constant encroachment of the teeming Jewish colony upon their own shrinking domain,⁴⁴ and Jewish funeral parties had often been molested on the same route before. As the wailing throng surged past a big factory where many of the local Irish worked, the employees pelted the crowd with iron nuts and bolts. A riot ensued as the Jews threw back the missiles and tried to break into the building. Order was almost restored when the arrival of two hundred police

⁴¹ Louis Wirth, *The Ghetto* (Chicago, 1928), 180-81; *American Hebrew* (New York), LXV (May 19, 1899), 71.

⁴² *Die Welt* (Vienna), III (June 2, 1899), 8. Cf. the troubles that a Jewish storekeeper's daughter had in a Welsh mining town in Iowa in the 1890's. Edna Ferber, *A Peculiar Treasure* (New York, 1939), 40-42, 50.

⁴³ *American Hebrew*, LXV (July 14 and August 18, 1899), 307, 482; *New York Tribune*, June 29, 1899, p. 11; *Die Welt*, III (March 24, 1899), 10; (August 11, 1899), 13.

⁴⁴ Philip Cowen, *Memories of an American Jew* (New York, 1932), 289. On the ethnic geography of the East Side see *Reports of the Industrial Commission* (19 vols., Washington, 1901), XV, p. xlvii and maps facing p. 470.

reserves made matters much worse.⁴⁵ The New York police force was predominantly Irish and had a reputation for brutal treatment of East Side Jews. Political rivalry had recently inflamed bad feelings; the Jews had rebelled en masse against Tammany Hall in the mayoralty election of 1901, in which police corruption was the main issue.⁴⁶ Accordingly, the police hurled themselves upon what remained of the funeral procession with abusive language and flailing clubs. All told, about two hundred were injured, mostly Jews, with most of the injuries brought on by the police.

Throughout this period of ethnic turbulence, one must remember that the genial and democratic norms of American life remained basically undisturbed. Although some of the hostile trends in the late nineteenth century were obviously creating serious difficulties for many Jews, none of those trends occupied as yet a prominent place on the larger American scene. The story of anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age is worth telling, however, if it suggests how the basic pattern of the more serious movements of political anti-Semitism in the 1920's and 1930's came into being. For those later movements, the Gilded Age set the stage and trained the cast. When conditions comparable to those of the 1890's recurred a generation later, the same groups in society led the way. Patrician anti-Semites now had the opportunity to formulate a racist immigration policy. In the Midwest the tradition of agrarian nationalism energized the anti-Jewish campaigns of a succession of inflationists and Anglophobes from Henry Ford to Father Coughlin. And in the cities the Bund and the Christian Front got their membership from people of immigrant background.

Yet these three groups remained, as they had been at the outset, remote and incompatible allies, poles apart at the extremes of American society. For half a century the pattern endured, but it never congealed. Its components never overcame their own alienation from one another.

⁴⁵ Testimony given to the Mayor's investigating committee is summarized in *American Hebrew*, LXI (August 15-22, 1902), 355-56, 384, and the official report appears on pp. 497-98. See also *New York Tribune*, July 31, 1902, pp. 1, 3; *New York World*, July 31, 1902, pp. 1-2, and August 2, 1902, p. 4.

⁴⁶ *American Hebrew*, LXI (August 15, 1902), 355-56; Charles Bernheimer (ed.), *The Russian Jew in the United States* (Philadelphia, 1905), 257. The overwhelmingly Gaelic complexion of the New York police force is evident from the random lists of names in *Report of the Police Department of the City of New York*, 1900, pp. 48-56.